

**Testimony of Jenn Hatch, Program Advocate
Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)
Before the Government Administration & Elections Committee**

February 22, 2010

Chairperson Slossberg, Chairman Spallone and members of the GAE Committee, thank you for providing me with the opportunity today to submit testimony in support of HB 6021 and HB 6022 to ensure the integrity of the Citizens' Election Program.

It has been a difficult stretch for advocates of "Clean Elections" in the courts. The U.S. District Court decision striking down components of our existing Citizens Elections Program, coupled with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens' United case require legislative efforts to enable us to continue our work to keep special interest money out of our election process.

Despite these setbacks, there are increasing indications that efforts to reform our elections process holds strong popularity among the public. At ConnPIRG, we remain as committed as ever to ensuring "clean elections," including the elimination of special interest influence in the dearest of democratic traditions.

We applaud the Governor and you, the leaders of the GAE Committee, for committing to save the Citizens Election Program. While the program's current status threatens to undermine its integrity, we feel strongly that we must move ahead swiftly to ensure that candidates can decide to participate with confidence.

As most know, there are four areas that must be addressed in any reform bill. First, and most importantly, we would encourage the Committee to act as swiftly as possible to repeal CGS 9-717. The section, which now forces the legislature to act within 7 days should the State's appeal of Green Party of CT vs. Garfield be denied, can only undermine the confidence of those who wish to participate in the CEP. Please send a message that we are committed to the CEP by repealing this poison pill.

Additionally, we urge the committee to ensure that any bill that moves forward includes provisions to address the issues of minor party qualification, windfall grant amounts and finally the trigger provisions that Judge Underwood found unconstitutional. Again, in order achieve the clarity that will encourage candidates to participate, our goal must be to address all of the Court's concerns.

Thanks again for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I look forward to working with you throughout the upcoming session on this issue of critical importance.

ConnPIRG is a statewide, non-profit advocacy organization, founded in 1972. Our mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.